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THE CRISIS IN AFRICA

Talk to the Scottish Churches Council and Christian Aid
Glasgow, Tuesday 15 October 1985

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Travelling from Ethiopia to Glasgow I was reminded of two
quotations; the first from the Sermon on the Mount of Olives:

"And there shall be famines and pestilences in divers places".
and second, Ebenezer Elliott's hymn:

"When wilt thou save the people?
Oh God of Mercy, when?
The people, Lord, the people,
Not thrones and crowns, but men.
Shall crime bring crime forever,
Strength aiding still the strong?
Is it thy will, Oh Father,
That man shall toil for wrong?"

The tragedies wrought in Africa during the 1970s and the
first half of this decade are known in varying degrees to everyone
who reads the newspaper or watches television. Among 24 African
countries more than 35 million people have been seriously affected
and more than 10 million have migrated in search of food. There
are more homeless refugees in Africa than on any other continent.

Recently and historically Ethiopia has been among the most
seriously afflicted. Ethiopia, with 44 million inhabitants,
roughly 8% of Africa's total population, occupies some 1.2 million
square kilometers in over half of which food supply remains at best
precarious. Ethiopia has the second largest population and is one
of the three poorest of all African nations. Its Gross National
Product is less than US\$140 per capita and even during its best
years indigenous food production is less than 75% of minimum need.

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During the recent drought more than eight million inhabitants, about 20% of the population, have been seriously affected. More than one million have migrated from their homes in search of food. In the northern territories more than two-thirds of the children are in a state of severe malnutrition and it is estimated that over 200,000 children are now effectively orphans, having been irreversibly parted from their natural parents, many of whom have probably died, others having been separated during the hunger-induced migrations.

During 1985 more than one million tonnes of food aid was distributed to roughly six million starving Ethiopians. Of this total, about 64% was delivered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the remainder through the Ethiopian Government Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. Distribution of this food has employed more than 70% of all the available trucks. About 115,000 tonnes have been air lifted out of Addis Ababa, 12,000 tonnes of which has been delivered by free drop in RAF Hercules aircraft, each flight carrying 18 tonnes of cereals which are dropped on pallets from heights between 15 and 25 feet above the ground.

One of the most contentious and sensitive steps taken has been the obligatory resettlement of Ethiopians from the drought-prone areas to regions where annual rainfall is expected to be more adequate and reliable. Resettlement of some 2.5 million people by August 1986 has been proposed. So far, about 183,000 families have been moved to the new resettlement areas. The logic behind the program is that in about half of Ethiopia's 14 provinces food production is insufficient for local need even in the years when rains are normal. Nevertheless, to relocate a population of this size presents difficulties of immense complexity. The people will require adequate facilities for housing; food and other agricultural production; water, sanitation and other hygienic necessities; health delivery systems; communication and transportation services;

schools, clinics, and all of the other amenities essential to even the most basic and primitive of human existence. To provide even minimum essential services and facilities is probably beyond the resources of the Ethiopian government and will call for continued external assistance for several years in the future. In addition, for the present and immediate future, emergency food aid, together with other essential supporting services are urgently needed. Over six million Ethiopians are expected to be dependent upon external food aid for at least another 12 months. More than 400,000 are still displaced from their homes. The following are the estimated emergency needs over the next 12 months:

- 1.3 million tonnes of food grains (this is by no means beyond the world's resources since at present world grain stocks are close to their highest on record).
- \$123 million for such supporting services as transportation and delivery systems. Most urgently needed are at least another 300 trucks. It was pleasing to learn that Live Aid and Band Aid have promised 100 trucks together with \$1.3 million for maintenance. In addition, USAID is expected to deliver 150 new trucks together with substantial funds for vehicle repair.
- \$34 million is needed for water supply and sanitation in the form of water tankers, hygienic latrines and disinfectants.
- \$96 million is needed for seeds, tools and fertilizers in order to re-establish smallholders who lost everything during the recent drought years. One of many serious related problems is the apparent incapacity of the State Farms to multiply and deliver seed of appropriate quality and adequate quantity.

On best estimates, the following are the percentages of the expressed needs that have been pledged by external donors:

- Emergency food supplies - 60%
- Supporting services - 70%
- Water and sanitation facilities - 24%
- Medical supplies - 36%
- Seeds, tools and fertilizers - 4%

To dispute whether it is better to attempt rehabilitation of the highlands damaged by drought and over-population, or to resettle people into other areas of the country would seem a somewhat pointless debate since the resettlement is already going ahead and more than one-quarter of a million people have already been moved. The question for the people of goodwill outside Ethiopia is: Do we leave them to make the best of it with their own resources, or give every help within our means to ensure they not only survive but progress to as reasonable a standard of living as is possible under the prevailing ecological conditions?

FAMINE AND DROUGHT

To witness the agony of famine makes eating a pain of guilt. Can any human spectacle be more appalling than a mother too debilitated even to weep for the child dead or dying in her arms? It is estimated that at least one million people will die this year of starvation. Chronic malnutrition reduces the potential life span of at least half the world's population and more than 75% of the people of Africa. Chronic and particularly seasonal malnutrition is a familiar phenomenon, particularly in the semi-arid tropic (SAT) regions that extend around and south of the Sahara from Mauritania and Senegal in the West to Ethiopia and Somalia in the east, and down through many countries in eastern and southern Africa. Malnutrition is particularly severe in the months immediately before the harvest when domestic stocks are running low and when the population, especially the women, are so busy in the fields, first collecting the harvest and then preparing the soil for the next planting, that they have little time to take care of the family's food needs.

Malnutrition is the result of a diet that is insufficient in quantity and inadequate in nutritional quality. Since most of the SAT produce less than 80% of their food needs, malnutrition is a condition they live with at all times.

But malnutrition is not famine. Famine causes massive and prolonged starvation. Victims of famine resort to actions too horrible to describe. Famine is not caused simply by drought and crop failure. The causes of famine are essentially structural and economic, rather than climatic. Though the severe droughts served to precipitate famine in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Botswana, Chad, Sudan, Mali and many other African nations, the progenitors of famine were already well in place. Famine afflicts the rural poor when drought aggravates and exacerbates existing conditions of extreme and endemic poverty. The rich and influential rarely, if ever, suffer from famine. Famine comes about when governments fail or choose not to recognize that a serious situation is imminent.

Few governments are prepared to admit to conditions that may reflect adversely upon their competence or their ability to manage their national affairs. The attitude of the British government during the Irish famine was by no means atypical. Furthermore, governments inevitably take care of those physically and philosophically closest to themselves. One never finds politicians, bureaucrats or the armed forces starving during times of famine. For the most part, food stocks and first shipments go to the cities, not to the rural communities. In fact, there have been many instances during the most adverse conditions when food was transferred from poor rural communities to serve urban populations.

By keeping urban food prices low, governments depress prices to farmers and thus keep them at a bare subsistence level of existence. Consequently, it is those who produce the food, the poor peasant farmers, who are the ones most vulnerable to famine since they are the poorest and least influential members of most countries.

Vulnerability to famine depends upon:

- (1) Natural ecological conditions such as soil and climate;
- (2) Socio-economic and political conditions: the resources made available to farmers and such government policies as pricing, marketing and distribution by which their lives are controlled.

Though drought can neither be prevented nor predicted, fair prices will encourage farmers to produce surpluses in good years to be carried over as reserves for the years the rains fail. Fair and adequate prices will provide the farmer with cash to buy better seed, tools, fertilizer and livestock whereby to increase the family farm's productivity.

Famine is neither an act of God nor of nature. It results from social conditions of extreme poverty, and from mismanagement, neglect and misallocation of resources by national governments, international agencies and, in particular, the wealthy nations of the world.

A subsistence farmer possesses only three resources: land, livestock and labour, all of which are highly vulnerable to drought and its accompanying ecological stresses. But when given appropriate incentives and a fairer share of available resources, many subsistence farmers can become surplus producers. In Zimbabwe, thanks to the efforts of an enlightened Minister and Department of Agriculture, even during the last year of drought there was a significant increase in cereal production with over 50% of the increase coming from small and medium-scale farms.

Most impressive has been the increased production by the small farmers of the People's Republic of China since that country shook off the shackles of the Cultural Revolution. Between 1979 and 1983 grain production in China increased by 16.6% while population increased by less than 5%. Cotton production more than doubled, oilseed crops and sugarcane grew by 52% and 55% respectively, and grain imports dropped by more than 28% between 1983 and 1984. Twenty years ago people were writing off India as a country wherein permanent starvation could only be prevented by massive donations of foreign grain. Now India is a surplus producer and exporter of grain, thanks to its government's dedicated investment in and enlightened policy toward the rural agricultural community.

Richard H. Tawney, the English economic historian, likened the rural poor to a man standing up to his neck in water; a mild ripple will quickly drown him. People up to their necks in water or in poverty are in no state to revolt. Consequently, peasant revolts are not a common historical happening. Governments do not fear the rural poor. Therefore, ignored by their governments and the international community, it is the poor subsistence farmers, the principal food producers, not the city dwellers, who suffer from famine during the lean years of drought.

THE AFRICAN CRISIS

The impending food crisis has been evident for more than a decade as the African population has continued to grow at a faster rate than food production. The food deficits are now so widespread they can no longer be explained as simply the consequence of climatic uncertainty. If current trends continue, the deficits and need for food imports will triple by 1990, by which time at least 17 million tonnes of food imports will be needed annually simply to maintain 1975 levels of consumption.

So far, the international community has addressed itself only to emergency relief, little visible effort having been made to address both disaster relief and long-term development simultaneously. The emergency measures, even at the present scale of some \$3 billion will be at best a palliative if the relief efforts serve only to restore the status quo ante and make little progress towards repairing the structural conditions which render most African countries prone to repeated disaster and famine.

Sadly, most aid agencies are better able to respond to disasters than to long-term development. Resolution of the fundamental crisis will require careful and thoughtful long-term planning and sustained support for many years. Public opinion is often whimsical and inconstant and while, over the

last few months, the outpouring of public concern has moved governments to step up their relief assistance to Africa, both public and government opinion seem largely disposed to the vision of Africa's problem as one requiring short-term humanitarian assistance rather than a fundamental restructuring of chronic and appalling conditions of poverty. As stated earlier, Africa's crisis arises from deep-seated social and economic conditions which have been exacerbated rather than caused directly by drought.

Africa is a continent of about 530 million people. Over 50% of the land area is in arid or semi-arid regions where rainfall is sparse and uncertain in frequency and duration, and where the capacity to raise food crops is extremely low. It must be admitted that over the last decade this region has suffered one of the most severe sequences of droughts in recorded history, involving 250 million people in 24 countries. Even as rainfall improves, some 29 million people in 11 countries remain at risk and close to 5 million are still displaced from their homes.

POPULATION

The present population of 530 million will increase by 30% to close to 690 million by the end of the century. Already the poorest countries produce less than 75% of their food requirements, a proportion that will inevitably decrease as the population increases unless serious and concerted efforts are made to improve the efficiency of agricultural systems.

Though the years when drought will strike are not predictable, the regions and countries are. The fragility of the Ethiopian highlands has been known for centuries, one of the best indicators being the level of flow of the Nile. In 1984, following the recent severe drought, the Nile was at its lowest level in 50 years. Over 70% of the Nile waters come from the Blue Nile and the Atbara, both of which originate in the Ethiopian highlands. The seven lean years described in the Book of Genesis, which occurred around 1700 BC, were a direct result of the failure of rains in Ethiopia. Even

earlier, in 2150 BC, according to inscriptions in the tombs at Luxor, famine along the Nile was so severe that cannibalism became widespread. During the serious drought in Ethiopia between 831 and 839 AD the Emperor said "All men and animals are dying. God has forsaken us." During this period the Nile flood was at an all-time low. Famines and severe malnutrition have been familiar to Ethiopia for many centuries. Between 1250 and 1280 there were seven famines; between 1580 and 1630 there were 12 and severe famines occurred again in the 1880s, in 1958, in 1972, and 1974. The conditions prevailing in the latter, particularly the imperial indifference to the plight of the rural people, led directly to the deposition and assassination of the Emperor, Haile Selassie.

Most African governments now appear to recognize the need for greater investment in and higher priority to smallholder agriculture. Nevertheless, it is not fair to blame all of the recent catastrophe upon African government mismanagement. As already stated, the population increase in recent years has been dramatic, the average throughout Africa being 2.4% increase per annum, a level equivalent to a new Ghana or a new Mozambique every year. Furthermore, over 50% of the African population is under 18 years of age, creating a high degree of population dependency. Much of the increased population is attributable to improved health, some of the traditional killer diseases such as smallpox having been totally eradicated. With population increasing at 2.4% per annum while food production is increasing by only 1.5% per annum, family planning is an absolute necessity; in the near term there is very little hope that agricultural production can increase sufficiently to keep pace with the new mouths crying to be fed.

Aggravating the situation is a rapid rate of urban growth. The present 16% of Kenyans who are urban dwellers

will increase to 30% by the end of the century. In northern Ethiopia the human and livestock population has more than doubled over the last 25 years. Across the Sahel arable land per capita has declined from 0.47 to 0.39 hectares since 1978.

While the effect of the drought in Ethiopia and the Sahel has received more publicity, southern Africa has also suffered severely during the first years of this decade. In Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, between 1981 and 1983 crop production fell by 2 million tonnes and cattle losses exceeded 1.5 million head.

Apart from crop failure, drought stress renders plants, animals and humans more susceptible to infection. Among humans, iron deficiency anaemia, diarrheal diseases, viral hepatitis, measles and other infectious diseases common at all times will reach epidemic proportions during periods of severe food and water deprivation. Typhus and cholera are now at serious levels in several drought-stricken countries. Animals become more susceptible to foot-and-mouth disease, East Coast Fever, and even botulism as a result of their cannibalization of animal carcasses. During the Ethiopian famine of 1980 virtually all peasant livestock was wiped out by viral rinderpest brought into the country by draught and farm animals imported by the Italians. During the severe drought of the 1930s, 70% of Botswana's cattle died from foot-and-mouth disease.

THE AFRICAN ECONOMY

The recent drought has aggravated the very serious economic conditions prevailing in 24 African countries. Most of these were newly emerging from independence and struggling to establish stable systems of government and administration. During the 1970s all of these countries were hit hard by the world recession, made worse by a rapid increase in oil prices together with severely

depressed prices for the agricultural commodities which the African countries export and which often represent their sole source of foreign income. Sadly, there is no African cartel comparable to OPEC to stabilize prices for cocoa, coffee, cotton and tea. Today Ethiopia and Kenya have to export 10 times as much coffee as in 1974 to purchase the same quantity of fuel oil.

In 1975, among the African countries south of the Sahara, the collective total external debt was \$15 billion, the average interest rate charged to them was 5.6% and their debt service payments were roughly \$450 million. By 1984 the external debt had risen five-fold to \$78 billion, interest rates had gone up to 9.2% and the debt servicing had increased by a factor of 12 to \$5.5 billion per annum. At present the total debt of these countries represents more than 35% of their GDP and exceeds all of their export earnings. The responsibility for this complex combination of debilitating factors cannot be placed squarely upon the African governments - it has been largely beyond their control. Rather, it is a manifestation of recent upheavals in the world economy and the unwillingness of the rich nations of the world to treat the poor nations fairly.

RESPONSE BY THE WEALTHY

While there has been an immense outpouring of generosity by private citizens, churches, and non-governmental organizations throughout the world, the evidence suggests that the governments of the wealthy nations have been less than generous and that relatively little of the \$3 billion provided in emergency aid is new money. Most of it appears to be simply a reallocation of commitments made to other development assistance programs. Consequently, many long-term development programs may be seriously prejudiced by these sudden shifts to emergency aid. What is needed are significant new additional commitments and imaginative programs of long-term development, not simply a robbing of long-term Peter to pay short-term Paul.

It is depressing to observe how, over the last four to five years, a number of the wealthy nations have in fact reduced their total aid flows to long-term economic development in developing countries. The OECD Observer (July 1985) quotes the following net disbursements of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) as a percentage of GNP for the countries shown:

Kuwait	3.81
S. Arabia	3.29
Netherlands	1.02
Canada	0.50
Japan	0.35
U.K.	0.33
U.S.A.	0.24
USSR	0.18

Even more depressing is the significantly greater proportion of so-called aid that is provided for armaments rather than for social and economic improvements. Indeed we need to pray with Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick "Lord cure thy children's warring madness". At present world investment in armaments approximates \$300 per annum for every man, woman and child in the developing world. Investment in agricultural development in the developing countries represents less than \$2 per annum for each inhabitant of the poorer nations.

ACTIONS NEEDED

It must first be emphasized that there is no simple man-made solution to Africa's difficulties. Nevertheless, as defined by a group of highly dedicated and knowledgeable Africans who met in Canada recently, certain actions are evident and essential.

First, supplies of food on concessional terms will be required for many years in most African countries. This food however must be provided for development, not simply in response to ad hoc emergencies. Food aid needs to be integrated with

indigenous agricultural production. Otherwise, it may serve to depress rather than to promote agricultural self-sufficiency. The World Food Programme has demonstrated how Food-for-Work programs can use basic foodstuffs as wages for rural people engaged in reforestation, establishment of irrigation programs and other productive endeavors. Income generated from food aid sold in urban communities can be used to increase and stabilize prices to farmers thus encouraging them to produce more efficiently and abundantly.

As stated above, seed, small tools and fertilizer are urgently required in order to rehabilitate farmers made totally destitute by the drought. The effectiveness of such programs has been well demonstrated in Zimbabwe where smallholder farmers were ready to resume and increase their production as soon as the rains returned.

To prevent a recurrence of the recent disaster and to enable African governments to stand upon their own feet, there must be a long-term commitment to the strengthening of national agricultural and rural development programs, institutions and facilities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Agriculture is the driving engine of development; it has always been so throughout history. Consequently, first and foremost, the African nations must establish reliable agricultural systems and programs; the wealthy nations and the international agricultural research centres (IARCs) must help them to this end. Support for African agricultural research and development must concentrate upon improving existing crops and farming systems rather than attempting to import exotic technologies.

This has been the philosophy of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) since it began support for sorghum, millet, legume and rural forestry research in

the SAT 15 years ago. In several countries improved varieties and increased on-farm yields have been realized from research supported by the IDRC. For example, in Somalia, one of Africa's most desperately poor nations, early seeding of fast-maturing sorghum varieties combined with simple earthworks to catch the short duration rains, has led to significant increases in crop yields. In Mali, simple applied research carried out on small-holder farms in cooperation with the farmers has led to 10-fold increases in crop yields together with improved land-use efficiency.

Throughout Africa, timber provides 90% of the fuel used by rural communities for cooking and heating their dwellings. IDRC has established a network of rural social forestry projects in 18 countries surrounding the Sahara and throughout eastern and southern Africa. Multi-purpose trees provide fuel, food, feed, forage and fertilizer, the latter by deep pumping of nutrients from the sub-soil which pass into the leaves which then fall to provide nutrients to growing crops. IDRC was the Executing Agency for the International Council for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) and for the International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA) both of which are dedicated to more efficient use of land and other natural rural resources.

In post-harvest studies in many parts of Africa, small-scale cereal mills relieve rural women of over five hours a day, formerly devoted to hand-grinding of grain with large pestles and mortars. It has also been demonstrated that many of the traditional grain stores made from local materials are just as efficient and much less expensive than imported exotic designs.

Above all, the IDRC program has demonstrated the unique and vital role played by the smallholder farmer. It is the smallholder farmer who must become the leading edge of agricultural and economic development. Farmers must be placed higher on the social and influential scale than soldiers.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES

The Christian Church is growing faster in Africa than on any other continent in the world. The churches, particularly in the rural areas, are closer to the population than many governments and international agencies and have a correspondingly greater influence. Church communities, in common with other non-governmental organizations, are often better able to work at a grass roots level than are government-to-government programs. It is essential that development in Africa be a bottom-up rather than a top-down process. Top-down is the bureaucratic process advocated by dictatorial centralized systems of government. The bottom-up grass roots approach, in which smallholders and rural communities help in making the decisions which they have to implement, is surely the democratic Christian way and demonstrably works much more efficiently than a dictatorial bureaucracy.

When given the resources and incentives farmers and rural communities are much better able to solve their difficulties than are military governments.

In many lands the church was the founder and supporter of primary, secondary and tertiary education. The legacy of literacy and scholarship left by former colonial powers varies dramatically among African nations. Countries such as Mozambique and Angola began their independence with massive illiteracy and few people trained to higher educational levels. Mozambique had one agricultural graduate. While some countries are making significant progress, most developing African nations need extensive support and assistance for their educational institutions at all levels. It is through education and well-trained people that nations develop their technological, economic and social systems. The need for assistance in strengthening and supporting their educational and training facilities is evident throughout Africa.

In its "Statement on International Food Disorder" the World Council of Churches calls for ecumenical action and support for (a) peace and justice; (b) programs of international agricultural research to increase food production; (c) husbanding and renewing of land and natural resources; and (d) continuing educational programs in developing countries on the causes of hunger.

What I firmly believe we need is an International Salvation Army: an ecumenical body representative of all the major Christian religions that would collectively devote itself to supporting and helping the poor nations of Africa and other developing countries. Such an International Salvation Army might well consider as its guiding motto the one which inspires the Mennonite Central Committee which has 900 volunteers in 50 developing countries: "All those born of God are prepared by love to serve their neighbours, not only with their money but with their lives." If we have the will to do so, we of the wealthier nations can provide the financial and technical resources; we can commit a greater portion of our lives and energies to the needs of others; we can, in the words of Ebenezer Elliott, make sure that:

"Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,
And songs be heard instead of sighs."
